

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2011-2012, 15 February 2012

Question: E12-119

OUTCOME 4: Aged Care and Population Ageing

Topic: DEMENTIA

Written Question on Notice

Senator Boyce asked:

Alzheimer's Australia and Australian General Practice Network have both identified the need for action on diagnosis of dementia as part of their Federal Budget submissions:

- a) What action will be taken by the Government to address timely diagnosis of dementia in the context of the Government's primary health care reforms?
- b) If the Department is made aware of cutting edge research that could have immediate implications for developing treatments for dementia, are there occasions where you take a proactive approach and have your own experts assess the research or fund further research?
- c) If not, wouldn't that be a good idea?

Answer:

- a) The National Health Reform Agreement establishes the Australian Government's lead role in ongoing primary health care planning and reform in conjunction with states and territories. Under the Agreement, the Commonwealth and the states and territories will work together on system-wide policy and state-wide planning for GP and primary health care.

This work will improve the provision of primary health care services through the development of an integrated primary health care system and the establishment of Medicare Locals.

In addition, on 20 April 2012 the Government unveiled a comprehensive 10 year package to reshape aged care. It will build a better, fairer, sustainable and nationally consistent aged care system to meet the social and economic challenges of the nation's ageing population. The Living Longer Living Better aged care reform package provides \$3.7 billion over five years.

Through the aged care reform package, the Government will provide \$268.4 million over five years to tackle dementia, from when people first approach their GP with the early signs of dementia through to when they need a very high level of aged care.

The aged care reform package recognises that there is a critical need for more timely diagnosis to improve quality of life for people with dementia, provide earlier medical and social interventions and reduce hospital admissions. More appropriate management of behavioural changes as dementia progresses and improved legal, financial and care planning are also critical. Between 50 to 80 per cent of people with early stages of dementia are not being diagnosed in primary care. For those who are diagnosed, many do not receive a diagnosis until three years after they first notice symptoms. The Government will support primary health care providers to undertake more timely dementia diagnosis. GPs and practice nurses will receive much needed training and education programs and improved support to help them better diagnose dementia. This will reduce the period from symptom onset to diagnosis.

b) and c)

The Department of Health and Ageing closely monitors the outcomes of dementia related research, both within Australia and internationally. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia's lead agency for funding health and medical research. More than \$1.1 billion has been provided to fund health and medical research into ageing and age related diseases and health issues since 2001. The NHMRC has identified dementia and Alzheimer's disease as an area of strategic priority and has been working closely with the sector, including researchers, carers and consumers to achieve this outcome.

In 2011, NHMRC committed more than \$23 million for research into dementia and Alzheimer's disease. This research will help provide a better understanding of the underlying factors that cause dementia and it will also help identify new or improved treatments and services for individuals.

The Department undertakes a range of activity to assist in the translation of research findings into practice. As part of the Living Longer Living Better aged care reform package, this work is being expanded. Through the package, the Government will provide \$19.4 million over five years to support implementation of innovative ways of delivering aged care services, and support translation of research into everyday practice and actual care delivery. Innovations will be shared and promoted. Projects that promote innovation, improved care and better business practice in priority areas of care will be targeted. These include care for people with dementia, mental illness, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or other special needs, and palliative care.